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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/W, AF/RSA, AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2030

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KCRM](#) [SOCI](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER DELTA EX-MILITANT COMMANDER PROMISES PATIENCE

Classified By: Consul General Donna M. Blair for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (S) Okubo Robert, the self-styled founder of the Niger Delta Freedom Fighters and a subordinate of ex-militant leader Government Ekpemupolo ("Tompson"), told PolOff on January 21 that he had accepted the GON's amnesty because Ijaw leaders convinced him that Yar'Adua was sincere about developing the Niger Delta. Robert claimed he took up arms because of the marginalization of his people and the lack of development in the region. Although he complained that he and his former fighters had not seen benefits from the amnesty yet, he said he was willing to wait up to ten years to see development take place. Robert called for a clear development plan, for former militant leaders to be given governmental responsibility, and for former militants to be given education abroad. Robert, while young and passionate about his cause, does not come across as irrational nor radical. END SUMMARY

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FOUNDER OF THE NIGER DELTA FREEDOM FIGHTERS  
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12. (S) Okubo Robert, AKA "Amakuruboteria I" (spelling uncertain), told PolOff on January 21 in Benin City that he had been the Commander of "Camp Egbema One" in Edo State and the founder and commander of the Niger Delta Freedom Fighters. He said he commanded roughly 200 fighters. Robert considered himself part of the coalition of militant groups that operated under the collective name of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and referred to Tompolo as his General Officer Commanding. He said that, although he often operated independently, he could call upon Tompolo for reinforcements as needed and, in turn, responded to requests for assistance from Tompolo.

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MILITANCY FOR DEVELOPMENT  
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13. (S) Robert said he took up militancy in 2003 because he believed that Nigerian governments had marginalized the Ijaws and kept them from profiting from the riches taken from their native lands. He dropped out of university, where he was studying accounting, to take up arms in a communal struggle with the Isekiri, then later joined MEND. He cited lack of

infrastructure, potable water, schools, and clinics in the riverine regions of the Niger Delta as motivation.

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PEACE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
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14. (S) Robert accepted the GON amnesty offer on September 3, 2009, because "all our (Ijaw) leaders" urged acceptance, arguing that the Yar'Adua administration was sincere about development and that without peace there could be no development. Robert recognized that violence frightened away foreign investors and that peace was a necessary pre-condition for development. For the sake of development, therefore, he said he was prepared to surrender his arms and give peace a chance.

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WE WILL WAIT  
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15. (S) Robert claimed that, to date, he has seen no benefits from the amnesty. He said he and his former fighters had not received the promised payment of 1,500 naira (USD 10) per day in either December or January. Neither had he had seen any evidence of development. While he believed that Yar'Adua wanted to develop the Niger Delta and end the marginalization of the region, he expressed doubt about whether Yar'Adua's followers shared his sincerity. Nevertheless, Robert insisted that there would be no rapid return to violence. He said, "We have been waiting 50 years for development; we are

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willing to wait another ten," adding: "Government is not a person but a process."

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A NEW AGENDA  
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16. (S) Robert said the GON ought to develop a transparent plan of action with clear milestones based on the Niger Delta Technical Committee Report. He suggested that former militant leaders such as Tompolo and Boyloaf receive "portfolios" in state and federal governments, e.g. Minister of the Niger Delta. He also demanded new states and more Local Government Areas (LGAs) to give the Ijaws more control of their own affairs. In addition, he advocated electoral reform, including a new constitution, which would enhance transparency and accountability in government.

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RETRAINING OVERSEAS  
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17. (S) With respect to GON reintegration plans, Robert said he and his fighters wanted to be trained abroad. Asked why he did not want to be trained in Nigeria, he said that the quality of training was better overseas and that his former fighters needed first class credentials to overcome the inherent prejudice against them as Ijaws and ex-militants. He added that the elite of Nigeria send their children abroad for education, which reflects poorly on the quality of educational institutions in Nigeria and gave their children an unfair advantage in life.

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COMMENT  
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18. (S) Although at times latent anger tinged Robert's voice, Robert was articulate, controlled, and possessed an agenda consistent with the demands of many non-violent activists from the region. Other sources confirm that the leadership of his Niger Delta Freedom Fighters was relatively well educated, and his loyalty to Tompolo was unequivocal. He

denied that Tompolo was ever involved in illegal oil bunkering, for example, calling these allegations "slander." While some of his aspirations, such as educating ex-militants overseas, sound fanciful, he represents the partially-educated cadre of former militant leaders who demand that they be taken seriously by the GON and Nigerians more broadly. END COMMENT.

19. (U) ConGen Lagos coordinated this telegram with Embassy Abuja.  
BLAIR